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Islamic Terrorism: Simulating a Philosophy of Eternal Clash

“I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”

Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Benjamin Rush, 1800

The most predominant form of tyranny over the human mind, in the present times, is the linkage between Islam and terrorism. It has put more than a billion Muslims on the defensive as well as the rest of the world in unprecedented silence over the untold genocide and destruction of some Muslim societies over the pretext of war against terrorism. In many ways, it seems that an iron curtain is being drawn between Muslims and the rest of the world. Terrorism and Islam is the favorite subject of the various organs of mass media as well as the intellectuals and the political analysts. Muslims are perceived as aliens, opposed to the so-called Western values because of their faith, which is perceived as the single most important factor in their individual and collective lives. What is

even more disturbing, is the fact, that these ideas are being propagated by those who boast of having achieved excellence in respecting human rights to profess and to observe whatever sets of beliefs humans choose to lead their lives. With the result that Muslim institutions have come under unprecedented scrutiny and suspicion. Muslim schools, mosques, charitable organizations, and even cultural associations are perceived to be doing something that needs to be looked at with suspicion and distrust.

This essay is an attempt to see how this connection was made, what the possible motives behind this concocted relationship were, and where it has brought us today. Our study begins with a chronology of events leading to the events of 9/11, followed by the way these events were interpreted, and finally, an analysis of the relationship between religion and terrorism.

The Chronology:

The disintegration of the Soviet Union leading to the end of the Cold War was, indeed, a significant event. The ideological division of the world into two blocks came to an end. The Berlin wall fell and the iron curtain was lifted. The reasons for this event were complex and many but the last battle of this war was fought in Afghanistan, one of the least developed Muslim countries. The Afghan warriors were called the Mujahideen, waging Jihad against the Communists with the help of the American technology, Saudi money, and Pakistan's logistic support. During this war, the courage and faith of the Afghans received immense praise from the leaders of the free world. There was hardly any intellectual, leader or media expert who did not pay tribute to these fighters. Even though there were many Muslims who supported and even fought

for the Soviets, the victory over the Communists was attributed to the spirit of Jihad.

The demise of the Soviet Union resulted in a new fraternity between the old foes. Moscow and Washington became friends and partners in the global affairs. For the United States, it was a high point: the new contours of the world politics were perceived in the ultimate triumph of Capitalism. The Americans did not need the support of Afghanistan and Pakistan any longer. They showed their gratitude to these countries in leaving a Soviet puppet government in power in Kabul and in imposing economic sanctions on Pakistan. But these gestures were trivial compared to what was coming.

Soviet soldiers were still in Afghanistan when, in the fall of 1988, Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses" appeared. It hardly attracted any notable reader at that time but when Bradford witnessed the Muslim anger at the anti-Islamic tone of this book, it became the best seller. Ayatullah Khomeini's fatwa of death sentence for the author further boosted the sale. Rushdie emerged as an effective rod to beat the Muslim sensitivities. He was invited to the White House and there was hardly any institution or dignitary in the West that did not honour him. The British Queen knighted him. From that time onwards, ridiculing Islam became a popular industry in the United States as well as many other European countries. Medieval polemics against Islam were revived and the Muslims were portrayed as backward, afraid of the critiques of their culture, and prone to violence against the 'liberal and freedom loving' people of the other religious traditions. Any incident, no matter how small and localized, was blown out of proportions if it portrayed Islam as the new enemy.

French Revolution of 1789 has been portrayed as the most important event in Western history. But instead of celebrating its two hundred years, the French media gave more importance to a small incident that involved three Muslim girls. Gilles Kepel has captured this moment: “Could French society allow three Muslim girls (living in an under-privileged city suburb) to wear an Islamic veil to attend state school? The incident was all it took for Islam, in its militant version, to replace the moribund Soviet Union as the new ‘evil empire’, embodying the demonized figure of the barbarian Other against which all civilizations tend to define their own identity”.¹ While Europeans were engaged in showing their hatred against the book burning, veil, and the fatwa of death against a British author, across the Atlantic, a new ideology was being crafted.

This ideology had two dimensions: one stipulated by Francis Fukuyama in an article published in the summer of 1989,² and the other by Bernard Lewis. Fukuyama had argued that since liberal democracy had triumphed over all other systems of government, History, as a vehicle of human evolution, had come to an end. In other words, Hegelian idea of History had seen its ultimate manifestation and the ideological conflicts, sooner or later, would succumb to the might of not just liberal democracy but also to the economic system that had nourished it. This was indeed meant to give an intellectual flavour to the supremacy of the American way of politics and economy. The other dimension of this ideology pointed out the enemy that was still around.

¹ Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West: Islamic Movements in America and Europe* (Stanford University Press, 1997) p.1

² Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History” *The National Interest*. This article was later developed in a book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Penguin, 1992)

In September 1990, *The Atlantic Monthly* published “Roots of Muslim Rage” written by Bernard Lewis. Well-known for his polemics against Islam, this author wrote that the Muslims hated the Americans not because of their pro-Zionist policies in the Middle East but because of the very nature of the Western civilization. In his opinion, “At times this hatred goes beyond hostility to specific interests or actions or policies or even countries and becomes a rejection of Western civilization as such, not only what it does but what it is, and the principles and values that it practices and professes.”³ He argued that the Muslims accused ‘We of the West’ of sexism, racism, and imperialism, institutionalized in patriarchy and slavery, tyranny, and exploitation. “To these charges, and to others as heinous”, he confessed that “we have no option but to plead guilty- not as Americans, nor yet as Westerners, but simply as human beings, as members of the human race”. However, so far as the Muslims were concerned, he did not concede them the same membership of the human race but ‘something in the religious culture of Islam’ that leads even Muslim peasants and peddlers, in moments of upheaval and despair, ‘to an explosive mixture of rage and hatred’. Since America was the legitimate heir to the Western civilization which had witnessed tremendous developments in almost every field while the Islamic civilization had lagged behind, ‘America had become the archenemy, the incarnation of evil, the diabolic opponent of all that is good, and specifically, for Muslims, of Islam’.⁴

Lewis did not stop here. After giving examples of anti-American demonstrations in Pakistan in 1979 and 1989, he stated that even

³ Bernard Lewis, “Roots of Muslim Rage”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, Vol.266, No.3, pp.47-60.

⁴ *Ibid.*

demonstrations and fatwa against Rushdie's book were aimed at the Americans simply because the book had been published in the United States. Therefore, he concluded that these movements far transcend the level and policies of governments. "This is no less than a clash of civilizations- the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival [Islam] against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both."⁵ This was the birth of the idea of clash of civilizations.

Samuel Huntington synthesized these two dimensions of the new ideology-supremacy of the American civilization and the 'rage' of Islamic people against the United States- in his theory of the Clash of Civilizations. His contention was that the post-Cold war era would witness cultural conflicts. Since culture was the basis of civilization, he anticipated a long and bloody clash between various civilizations. He identified eight civilizations that were closed and sealed-off identities bound to clash but gave Islamic Civilization the lion's share.⁶ Like Bernard Lewis, he identified Islam as the foremost rival. He argued that the conflict between Islam and the West had been 'going on for 1,300 years'. Crudely cruising through history, he wrote that the Arabs surged west and north followed by the Crusaders from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Then, the Turks occupied Constantinople, the Balkans, and twice laid siege to Vienna. He went on the phase of colonialism when Britain, France, and Italy occupied North African and Middle Eastern countries. It will indeed be revealing if we quote his reading of the subsequent events. He says:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance", in *The Nation*, October 22, 2001.

“After World War II, the West, in turn, began to retreat; the colonial empires disappeared; first Arab nationalism and then Islamic fundamentalism manifested themselves; the West became heavily dependent on the Persian Gulf countries for its energy; the oil-rich Muslim countries became money-rich and, when they wished to, weapons-rich. Several wars occurred between Arabs and Israel (created by the West). France fought a bloody and ruthless war in Algeria for most of the 1950s; British and French forces invaded Egypt in 1956; American forces returned to Lebanon, attacked Libya, and engaged in various military encounters with Iran; Arab and Islamic terrorists, supported by at least three Middle Eastern governments, employed the weapon of the weak and bombed Western planes and installations and seized Western hostages. This warfare between Arabs and the West culminated in 1990, when the United States sent a massive army to the Persian Gulf to defend some Arab countries against aggression by another.”⁷

How did the warfare between the Arabs and the West culminated in 1990 when Saudi Arabia paid for the first Gulf War and many Arab and Muslim countries fought against Saddam Hussein? But historical accuracies, like his mentor, Lewis, were not a part of his agenda. What he wanted to impress upon his readers and the policy makers was that even the Gulf war proved that “this centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent. The Gulf War left some Arabs feeling proud that Saddam Hussein had attacked Israel and stood up to the West. It also left many feeling humiliated and resentful of the West's military presence in the Persian Gulf, the

⁷ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations”, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, 72/73

West's overwhelming military dominance, and their apparent inability to shape their own destiny.”⁸ Keeping in view his reading of this relationship between Islam and the West, he issued a fatwa:

“It is clearly in the interest of the West to promote greater cooperation and unity within its own civilization, particularly between its European and North American components; to incorporate into the West societies in Eastern Europe and Latin America whose cultures are close to those of the West; to promote and maintain cooperative relations with Russia and Japan; to prevent escalation of local inter-civilization conflicts into major inter-civilization wars; to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states; to moderate the reduction of counter military capabilities and maintain military superiority in East and Southwest Asia; to exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states; to support in other civilizations groups sympathetic to Western values and interests; to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests and values and to promote the involvement of non-Western states in those institutions.”⁹

In the afternoon of February 26, 1993, a bomb exploded beneath the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The Federal Bureau of Investigation identified Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, a blind cleric from Egypt, as the mastermind. He was arrested, convicted, and sent behind the bars along with a few others who were allegedly involved in this crime. This event led to many speculations. The journalists interviewed many scholars of Islam to find answers as to how and why a blind cleric who had moved to the United States in 1990 would plan something so horrible! Professor Bulliet, a well-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

known scholar of Islam and then director of the Middle East Institute (Columbia University), recalled one of such interviews:

“ She [the reporter] asked whether it was true that terrorist organizations in the Islamic world funded the World Trade Center bombing. I replied that I did not know but none of the information then published indicated such to be the case. Then she asked, “ Well, if the bombing was funded by an international Islamic terrorist ring, who do you think would have done it?” I asked her whether as a newsperson she thought it was appropriate to ask me to invent connections for which no evidence existed. She was somewhat miffed by this, but she indicated that the desire of her news director to gather vivid material was uppermost in her thinking.”¹⁰

This was not just an isolated case of a reporter trying to seek connections between Islam and terrorism. Bulliet remembered another encounter when a newsman asked his reaction to a news release from the Republican staff of a Congressional committee. This report was about a decision taken at the highest level in Tehran to launch terrorist attacks on the American targets. He told the reporter, “This is really stupid.” He said, “Yeah, I think it is too, but the news director doesn’t think it is.” Then the reporter told him “he did not like reporting such inflammatory speculations as news, but editors and news directors were eager for hot copy.”¹¹ As already mentioned, small events were brought as parts of a great conspiracy in the Muslim world against the leader of the ‘free’ world.

¹⁰ Richard W. Bulliet, “Rhetoric, Discourse, and the Future of Hope”, in *Under Siege: Islam and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University, The Middle East Occasional Papers 1, 1994)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

In 1994, *The Economist* issued a special edition on ‘Islam and the West’. It was mainly concerned with Huntington’s theory of the Clash of Civilizations. In a sensational way, the authors started as “The next war, they say...” This war, the magazine insisted would be between the West and Islam unless of course ‘both see that this is a moment for change’. But who should change? This question becomes clear after we read the first paragraph: “It is about an idea: perhaps the only idea of its kind in today’s world.”¹² This idea was none other than Islam. The author emphasized:

“The idea, Islam, ignores the frontier that most people draw between man’s inner life and his public actions, between religion and politics. It may be the last such idea the world will see. Or it may, on the contrary, prove to be the force that persuades other people to rediscover a connection between day-to-day life and a moral order. Either way, it denies turn-of-the-century western conventional wisdom”.¹³

Huntington theory kept receiving even more attention. Seminars and conferences were held to discuss the implications of the Clash of civilizations. Many universities in the United States and Europe offered special courses. There were many voices against this sinister idea. For example, German President, Prof. Roman Herzog, questioned the motive of this theory and declared it dangerous for the global peace. The Iranian President and the Prince Hassan of Jordan echoed his concern. But these sober reminders mostly went unheeded and, certain other events strengthened the chorus line in favor of the ideologues of the clash of civilizations.

¹² *The Economist*, August 6th 1994.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Shortly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Saddam Hussein attacked Kuwait. He had been a blue-eyed boy of the Americans during the long Iraq-Iran war. Since he was fighting against the American enemy, the leading Western countries equipped his military arsenals. After the war ended inconclusively, he was lured into this new adventure to annex Kuwait but that proved to be a fatal mistake. So long as he was fighting against Iran and using chemical weapons, the Americans and her allies were silent but now he had attacked a nation that was created by the British out of Iraq for their imperial purposes. What was perceived as his strength against Iran now appeared as dangerous to the world peace. The American led alliance of the Western and Muslim countries forced him to vacate the oil rich principality of Kuwait. But that was not the end of this epoch; a decade of economic sanctions, frequent bombing, denial of essential food and medical goods, and constant alienation of this major Muslim nation in the Middle East began.

The second major event was the rise of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. The Taliban were the same people who had fought the holy war against the Soviet Union but after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, their relevance to the global politics also took a negative turn. Afghanistan was forgotten and all those religious and ethnic factions that had stood against the Communists were now fighting their own indigenous battles. The Afghan students (Taliban) who had read books and lessons prepared by the Cold War warriors came into power. Poorly trained and only partially educated, their view of the Muslim state was far from what the times demanded. They discouraged female education, imposed compulsory veiling of women, even decreed that men should grow beards, and encouraged religious fanaticism. Afghanistan emerged as a living chapter from medieval history. But what is perplexing is

that they received encouragement from the West and received financial aid from the United States.

In the spring of 1997, the Project for the New American Century was established to promote American global leadership. Its statement of principles declared:

“As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States stands as the world's preeminent power. Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, America faces an opportunity and a challenge: Does the United States have the vision to build upon the achievements of past decades? Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?” It emphasized the need to strengthen American military power and foreign policy, “a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities.” Its founders declared:

“Our aim is to remind Americans of these lessons and to draw their consequences for today. Here are four consequences:

- We need to increase defense spending significantly if we are to carry out our global responsibilities today and modernize our armed forces for the future,
- We need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values,
- We need to promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad,

- We need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles.”¹⁴

The founding members of this organization included Elliot Abrams, Gary Bauer, William Bennett, Jeb Bush, Dick Cheney, Eliot Cohen, Aaron Friedberg, Francis Fukuyama, Donald Kagan, Zalmay Khalilizad, Dan Quayle, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz.

In January 1998, these signatories wrote a letter to President Clinton asking him to remove Saddam Hussein from powers:

“The only acceptable strategy is one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. In the near term, this means a willingness to undertake military action as diplomacy is clearly failing. In the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power. That now needs to become the aim of American foreign policy.”¹⁵

When President Clinton did not oblige these war hawks, they circulated an open letter to the House Speaker, Newt Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader, Trent Lott, in July 1998 urging them to take some initiative in removing Saddam Hussein from power and to help the opposition in Iraq establish a pro-American government. Soon, President Clinton would be involved in the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

On August 7, 1998, two American embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar as Salaam (Tanzania) were bombed. Usama bin Laden was suspected of masterminding these attacks.

¹⁴ <http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm>

¹⁵ <http://www.newamericancentury.or/iraqclintonletter.htm>

After about two weeks, American naval vessels fired cruise missiles to strike Bin Laden's camp in Afghanistan and a factory, al-Shifa, in the Sudan. Many innocent people were killed. Usama bin Laden, however, escaped. While many sane voices questioned the timing and the rationale of these strikes, the Conservatives in the Congress felt that these strikes were not enough. Newt Gingrich called them "pinpricks".¹⁶ But now, the civilization under siege had a face. Before we proceed further, let us have a look at this new face of terrorism.

Until 1996, "hardly anyone in the U.S. government understood that Usama Bin Laden was an inspirer and organizer of the new terrorism".¹⁷ During the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, Bin Laden was sent to help the Afghans in their struggle against Moscow. He belonged to a wealthy Saudi family in business partnerships with some leading luminaries of the United States including the Bush family. His involvement in the Afghan Jihad was considered useful in making it look like a war between Islam and atheism. In the words of a French diplomat, "These objectives also happened to coincide perfectly with U.S. concerns during the Cold War; as a result, the Islamists were generally considered the natural allies of the West until the early 1990s."¹⁸ Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia on the eve of Saddam's attack on Kuwait. He asked Riyadh to allow him organize "new brigades of the Mujahideen to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait and to overthrow Saddam Hussein's secular regime."¹⁹ The Saudis refused and

¹⁶ Quoted in The 9/11 Commission Report, p.117

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 108

¹⁸ Eric Rouleau, "Trouble in the Kingdom", Foreign Affairs, Volume 81, No.4, July/August 2002

¹⁹ Ibid.

instead leased military bases to the United States to launch Operation Desert Storm. Angry and frustrated, he went to Sudan. It was during his stay in the Sudan that the Americans suspected his involvement in terrorist activities. But when Khartoum offered to hand him over to them, the American refused and insisted only on his exile.²⁰

In 1996, Bin Laden returned to Afghanistan, now, under the control of the Taliban. The same year, the CIA 's head of the Directorate of Operations, David Cohen, established a special unit under an officer, 'who was especially knowledgeable about Afghanistan' to analyze intelligence on and plan operations against Bin Laden. This was the birth of the Bin Laden unit.²¹ The chief of this unit 'saw Bin Laden's move to Afghanistan as a stroke of luck'. The CIA established contacts with some Pashtun tribes to keep a watch on his 'local movements, business activities, and security and living arrangements'. By the fall of 1997, the Bin Laden Unit had 'roughed out a plan for these Afghan tribals to capture Bin Laden and hand him over for trial either in the United States or in an Arab country.'²²

From 1997 to the end of 2000, many plans were prepared to capture or kill Bin Laden but amazingly, none of them were carried out. The 9/11 Commission received lame excuses from the CIA

²⁰ The American ambassador to Khartoum, Timothy Carney was approached by the Sudanese minister of defense, Fatih Erwa for this purpose. But Carney wanted only his expulsion. The Saudis refused to take him back on the pretext that his citizenship had been revoked. Commenting on this issue, the 9/11 Commission observed, "Ambassador Carney had instructions only to push the Sudanese to expel Bin Laden. Ambassador Carey had no legal basis to ask for more, at the time, there was no indictment outstanding". The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 110.

²¹ The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 109

²² Ibid. P.110

officers like the fear of anger from the Muslim countries, killing of civilians, and damaging a mosque in the compound where Bin Laden lived.²³ In view of the findings of the 9/11 Commission, it is fair to believe that Bin Laden's movements were under constant vigil of the CIA. As a matter of fact, they believed that the Bin Laden unit had done an 'extraordinary and commendable work'. An officer of the CIA told the Commission that his chief of station in London "was as much a part of the al Qaeda struggle as an officer sitting in [the Bin Laden unit]."²⁴ However, when an American Navy destroyer, the USS *Cole* was attacked on October 12, 2000, the later investigation revealed that Bin Laden had supervised this operation.

After the controversial elections of 2000, Bush became the President. This brought most of the members of the New American Century Project into power. On January 25, the CIA chief briefed Bush about the *Cole* investigation. It also included the report about the incident with a judgment that "al Qaeda was responsible, with the caveat that no evidence had been found that Bin Laden himself ordered the attack."²⁵

In June 2001, a presidential draft was circulated in the Defense Department directing the Secretary to 'develop contingency plans' to attack the Taliban and al Qaida in Afghanistan. When asked as to why this plan was not executed, President Bush told the Commission that the problem "would have been how to do it if there had not been another attack on America." He was perhaps referring to the *Cole* incident as the first attack against America.

²³ For details, see, The 9/11 Commission Report, chapters 4 and 6.

²⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report, p.184.

²⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report, p.210.

Moreover, he said, “It would have seemed like an ultimate act of unilateralism. But he said that he was prepared to take that on.”²⁶

On September 4, 2001, Richard Clarke, the National Counterterrorism Coordinator, sent an impassioned note to Condoleezza Rice imploring: “ Are we serious about dealing with the al Qida threat?...Is al Qida a big deal?... *Decision makers should imagine themselves on a future day when the CSG [Counterterrorism Security Group] has not succeeded in stopping al Qida attacks and hundreds of Americans lay dead in several countries, including the US....* That future day could happen at any time.²⁷ He also complained about the CIA inertia in resisting funding any of the presidential directives. He concluded: “*You are left waiting for the big attack, with lots of casualties, after which some major U.S. retaliation will be in order.*”²⁸ This led to the approval of the plan to attack Afghanistan.

On September 9, 2001, Ahmed Shah Massoud, the leader of anti-Taliban Northern Alliance was killed. The next day, September 10, 2001, Stephen Hadley, Deputy National Security Advisor finalized his plan to topple the Taliban regime. The next morning, the hijacked commercial planes hit twin towers in lower Manhattan and the Pentagon building, killing 2,973 people.

After addressing the American people that evening, Bush met with a group, that he would later call his ‘war council’. He decided not only to punish these criminals but also those who had harboured them. Colin Powell suggested sending clear signals to Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Arab states to ‘act now’. Rumsfeld urged the President “to think broadly about who might have harbored the

²⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report, p.209

²⁷ The 9/11 Commission Report, p.212 (emphasis original)

²⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 213 (emphasis original)

attackers including Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Sudan, and Iran.” During these discussions, Bush stressed, “The attacks provided a great opportunity to engage Russia and China.”²⁹

On September 12, Bush told the National Security Council that the United States was ‘at war with a new and different kind of enemy’. A new plan came under consideration that went beyond al-Qaida. ‘Elimination of terrorism as a threat to our way of life’, was the new aim that included ‘pursuing other international terrorist organizations in the Middle East.’³⁰ On September 13, Richard Armitage met with the Pakistan ambassador and the chief of Pakistan military intelligence, Mahmud Ahmed. He asked them to take the following steps otherwise Pakistan ‘too would be at risk’:

1. to stop al Qaida operations and stop all logistical support for Bin Laden;
2. to give the United States blanket overflight and landing rights for all military and intelligence operations;
3. to provide territorial access to U.S. military intelligence and other personnel to conduct operations against al-Qaida;
4. to provide the U.S. with intelligence information;
5. to publicly condemn the terrorist acts;
6. to cut off all shipments of fuel to the Taliban and stop recruits from going to Afghanistan; and,

²⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report, p.330

³⁰ The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 331

7. *if the evidence implicated Bin Laden and al-Qaida, and the Taliban continued to harbour them, to break relations with the Taliban government.*³¹

Mahmud Ahmed returned to Pakistan. General Musharraf's government agreed to all the American demands and sent Mahmud to talk to Mulla Omar. On September 18, he called Washington and conveyed the response of the Taliban leader, which according to the Report of 9/11 Commission "was not negative on all these [above-mentioned] points." But for the reasons best known only to the American establishment, they knew that the Taliban were 'unlikely to turn over Bin Laden'.³² What the Report did not mention was the phone call from Mulla Omar to the relevant officer in the Pentagon pledging handing over Bin Laden if there was evidence that he was involved in the 9/11 attacks.

On September 20, Bush addressed the joint session of the Congress and 'for the first time' blamed al-Qaida not only for 9/11 but also for the 1998 embassy bombings and for bombing the USS *Cole*. He declared that 'every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make: Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.' He continued: "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated....*This is civilization's fight.*"³³

The Interpretation:

Officially, Osama bin Laden was still a suspect but soon after the attacks of 9/11, an unprecedented media trial began not only

³¹ The 9/11 Commission Report, p.331. (Emphasis added)

³² The 9/11 Commission Report, p.335.

³³ Quoted in 9/11 Commission Report, p. 337.

against the alleged culprit but also against Islam. A breed of ‘experts’ suddenly emerged who had not only known this side of ‘Islam’ since a long time but had often warned the Americans before these unfortunate events. The well-known and widely circulated magazine of the American Jewish League published a provocative article against the American Muslims. It warned the American political leaders especially President Bush, who, during a visit to the Washington mosque, had said that ‘there are millions of good Americans who practice the Muslim faith who love their country as much as I love the country, who salute the flag as strongly as I salute the flag.’:

”The Muslim population in this country is not like any other group, for it includes within it a substantial body of people-many times more numerous than the agents of Osama bin Ladin-who share with the suicide hijackers a hatred of the United States and the desire, ultimately, to transform it into a nation living under the strictures of militant Islam. Although not responsible for the atrocities in September, they harbor designs for this country that warrant urgent and serious attention.”³⁴

Commentary was not the only magazine, which published such views. The books related to this event were churned out so quickly that by September 2002, 150 titles were in circulation. Commenting on these books, Lorraine Adams wrote:

“ I thought often of George Orwell's 1945 words on bad writing: ‘A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks.’ Bad writing works the same way, Orwell wrote. It ‘becomes ugly and

³⁴ “The Danger within: Militant Islam in America”, *Commentary*, November 2001.

inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.’ I have always believed this. But in truth, I had forgotten about it. It took these books during these times to bring this prodigal back to creed.”³⁵ Publishers Weekly also warned about the nature of these books: “Whether publishers are motivated by plucky optimism or cannibal instincts, they are pushing an astonishing number of September 11-related books into the market.”³⁶

In addition to these books, television kept showing the horrors of the destruction of the twin towers. It seemed that those few moments were frozen. Most of these writers on terrorism were invited to express their opinions about the background of these events, identity of the terrorists, and most importantly, the motives behind these attacks. If someone pointed out some caveats in the media story, their views were dismissed. However those who had described these events and the motives of the terrorists in sensational details like an age-old conflict between good and evil were seen on the mini screen very frequently. For example, Peter Bergen, the author of *Holy War Inc.* appeared on television ‘at least 800 times.’ “With a British accent and an Oxford history degree, he was calm, reasonable. His book made the New York Times list, and others. Right behind him was Steven Emerson, author of *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us*, with almost 400 appearances. He, too, made the bestseller lists. Next came Harvard law professor Alan M. Dershowitz with 340 appearances. Behind, but still making a strong showing was Middle East scholar Daniel Pipes, with about 150. Dershowitz and Pipes have new books this month. Their television exposure might well make their books

³⁵ Lorraine Adams, “Terrorism and the English Language”, Washington Monthly, September 3, 2002.

³⁶ Quoted in Lorraine Adams.

bestsellers. Together, these four men frame the way terrorism is discussed for millions of viewers and for hundreds of thousands of readers”³⁷

The American media had assumed a new dimension. A country that had distinguished itself as a republic of the free, was suddenly transformed into an indoctrinating club. Any questions about the real terrorists behind these attacks, their believable motives, an impartial investigation were dubbed as unpatriotic. Tom Hayden, an American state senator, has rightly pointed out:

“In the aftermath of September 11, American conservatives launched a political and intellectual offensive to discredit any public questioning of the Bush administration's open-ended, blank-check, undefined war against terrorism. The conservative message, delivered through multiple media outlets, was that dissenters from the Bush administration's war were those who allegedly "blamed America first," that is, dared to explore whether Bin Laden's terrorism was possibly rooted in Western policies toward the Islamic world, the Palestinians, and the oil monarchies of the Middle East.”³⁸

With a zeal and vigour known only in the days of McCarthyism, The Conservative and Zionist war hawks started a campaign against all those voices, which they did not like. Nobody could question the theory of more than fifteen hundred's years old enmity between Islam and Judeo-Christian tradition. Susan Sontag was attacked by the right wing for an article in the New Yorker and Bill Maher was targeted for being politically incorrect. Vice President Cheney's wife showed concern for the dissenting voices in the

³⁷ Lorraine Adams, *Terrorism and the English Language*.

³⁸ Tom Hayden, “It is Empire Versus Democracy”, AlterNet, September 10, 2002.

college classrooms. William Bennett announced plans to expose anyone who "blamed America first" through advertising full-page intimidations. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer added an official warning when he crafted an "offhand" remark that Americans should "watch what they say." Chief Republican political strategist, Karl Rove, proposed that his party's candidates make the war on terrorism an election issue. The chairman of the Republican House Campaign Committee declared that all those who question the motives of 9/11 or about the American reaction to it, were "giving aid and comfort to the enemy."³⁹ It is indeed revealing to see how these zealots treated a poet.

The poet laureate of New Jersey, Amiri Baraka, recited a long poem on September 20, 2002. It was called, "Somebody Blew Up America," which was mostly about massacres, murders and oppression by the powerful against blacks, Jews and others. In one stanza, he asked the forbidden question:

“Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed
Who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers
To stay home that day
Why did Sharon stay away?”

This recitation prompted the governor of New Jersey to ask the poet to resign from his post. Baraka's original name was LeRoi Jones. His plays, poems and art had brought him prominence in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's. It was in recognition of his services that the New Jersey Council for the Humanities and the State Council on the Arts had appointed him as the poet laureate of

³⁹ Tom Hayden, "It is Empire Versus Democracy".

the state. But this poem literally stripped him of all his previous work. Shai Goldstein, the regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, stated that the poem "was not only anti-Semitic, but it was also insulting to members of families who had to suffer the death of relatives on 9/11." Gerald Stern, the state's first laureate and a member of the selection committee, said that after hearing his poem, he was "shocked at the stupidity of it." He further elaborated that "We don't censor poets," but "lies never serve good, and there was hate in it." Baraka tried to defend his verses and stressed that everything said about Israel in this poem 'is easily researched,' but the real issue was, he insisted, "If you criticize Israel, they hide behind the religion and call you anti-Semitic."⁴⁰ It is indeed true that lies never serve good and hatred creates such a big distance that truth becomes its first victim. But nobody questioned that breed of experts who were telling lies and spreading hatred against more than a billion Muslims.

While it became almost a sin to question the officially propagated version of 9/11, there was absolutely no restraint in disparaging Islam. Islam was equated with Nazism, the Quran was called Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and the Prophet of Islam was called a terrorist. In the words of Professor Asani, "Muslims have been likened to creatures who separate 'like protozoa into cells from two to infinity'. American Muslims have been declared to be Trojan horses and a danger to the national security and should, therefore, all be deported, while the holy city of Mecca should be nuked to send a message to all Muslims. A magazine with national

⁴⁰ Matthew Perdy, "New Jersey Laureate Refuses to Resign over Poem", New York Times, September 27, 2002.

circulation even printed an article calling for Muslims to be buried in pigskins and lard!”⁴¹

This was not just the interpretation of the events of 9/11 but some of the declared manifestations of the ‘other civilization’ that was attacked by the Islamic civilization. The high priests of Harvard and Princeton, Huntington and Bernard Lewis, provided the intellectual and academic credentials to the theory of Islamic terrorism. Lewis argued that what happened on 9/11 had a long history of conflicts between Muslims and Christians. This enmity and hatred of Christianity was visible in almost every episode of history. The rise of Muslim civilization did not mean much to him except an aberration in history. However, since their decline as a world power, Muslims have been conspiring against the Western civilization despite constant humiliations. “Usually the lessons of history are most perspicuously and unequivocally taught on the battlefields” but, he declared, “there may be some delay before the lesson is understood and applied.”⁴²

While these explanations were propagated widely through reviews, television talks, and seminars, two of Lewis’ protégés, Daniel Pipes and Martin Kramer were busy in profiling the activities and ideas of university professors teaching and writing about the Middle East. They opened a website to monitor what was going on in the academic institutions.⁴³

Even after killing thousands of Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq, these war hawks still continue to beat their drums that Muslims

⁴¹ Ali Asani, “Pluralism, Intolerance and the Quran,” *American Scholar* 71, no.1 (Winter 2002), pp.52-60

⁴² Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.8

⁴³ See CampusWatch.org

'hate' the Americans not because of their unconditional support to Israel but because of the 'American values' or the values of the western civilization.

In addition to these interpretations, there were voices urging the American conservatives to fill the void created by the end of the British Empire. The Wall Street Journal, in an October 2001 editorial, observed that September 11 created a unique political opportunity to advance the whole Republican-conservative platform. Worse, the real conservative agenda is to create an American empire, not simply rout out the al-Qaida organization.⁴⁴ Another writer who had justified naked aggressions, savagery, and occupation as necessary tools for peace, and had earned a membership in the New American Century Project, published "The Case for American Empire" in the conservative organ, the Weekly Standard.⁴⁵ Boot endorsed a return to the nineteenth century British imperialism, this time under American hegemony. "Afghanistan and other troubled lands today cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen in jodhpurs and pith helmets."⁴⁶ This call for the American Empire was echoed by another well-known columnist, Charles Krauthamer, and in the works of historians, Paul Kennedy and Robert D. Kaplan, who had paid glowing tributes to the tone and tenor of Bernard Lewis.

September 11 thus became a defining moment in American history and a discourse with others. It was equated with evil, different from all the previous evils in history yet easily understood in the light of the Muslim faith. "Teaching 9/11" became a popular subject at

⁴⁴ Quoted in Tom Hayden, "It is Empire Versus Democracy".

⁴⁵ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002)

⁴⁶ New York Times, March 31, 2002

many universities. Selected reading of Muslim history and scripture became a standard practice in debates and seminars. The Quranic verses about *Jihad* and relationship with Christians and Jews were pulled out and interpreted, not in the context of their revelations or even history, but in the context of the billowing dark clouds of the twin towers. It seemed that Islam was revealed in the morning of the Black Tuesday. Bin Laden, still a suspect, emerged as the mastermind through his ‘global network of al-Qaida’ behind all acts of violence in the world. Decades old resistance movements, acknowledged and supported by the United Nations, were portrayed as the nests of Muslim terrorists. Even those movements that were supported by the United States were portrayed in this newly acquired model of looking at Islam. Jack Miles, senior advisor to the President at the J. Paul Getty Trust, offered a new interpretation to the independence of Morocco from France and the Afghan struggle against the Soviet Union. He reminded his readers: “In the last days of World War II, what mattered in a Muslim country like Morocco was not that racist fascism had been defeated but that the yoke of Christian France might at least be thrown off. In the last days of the Cold War, what mattered in a country like Afghanistan was not that godless communism had been defeated but that the knout had fallen at last from the fist of Christian Russia.”⁴⁷ He did not even bother to look at all those Christian countries of Europe and the United States who helped Afghanistan in defeating a ‘fellow’ Christian country that was oddly called Communist Russia.

Documentaries and feature films depicting Islam as a ‘dangerous faith’ and Muslims as terrorists were shown to millions of viewers.

⁴⁷ Jack Miles, “Theology and the Clash of Civilizations”, <http://www.crosscurrents.org/Mileswinter2002.htm>

In one movie, a Lebanese Muslim medical student was shown as one of the hijackers of the plane that hit the symbols of the American power.⁴⁸ Most of the writings and television discussions hid truth under abstractions. In the words of Lorraine Adams, most of these writings “use hackneyed plotlines, stock characters, and omission of inconvenient facts. They replace the blunt actuality of terrorism with the reassuring themes of the adventure tale, the spy thriller, the cloak-and-dagger story, even Perry Mason.”⁴⁹

Religion and Terrorism:

Why is Islam equated with terrorism? The argument advanced by the proponents of this theory is that the terrorists are Muslims and that they invoke religious ideology in carrying out their terrorist activities. The reasons advanced by these ‘experts’ are deeper than the mundane affairs of power politics- the terrorists want to annihilate the ‘other’ who is free, advanced in economy and technology, and show more respect for human lives and human rights than what their own tradition offers. It is that frustration in having missed some of the enlightening phases in their history like Reformation, Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, they argue, that makes Muslims so violent.

It would sound convincing to those who have absolutely no knowledge of history or those who had never been in contact with Muslims. Ignorance of Islam and Muslim history could possibly be the cause of such a far-fetched idea. But most of the advocates of

⁴⁸ The Hamburger Cell, 2004.

⁴⁹ Lorraine Adams, “Terrorism and the English Language.”

this theory claim to be experts and are not, in any way, unaware of those episodes in Muslim history, which they conveniently ignore because they would annihilate their hate generating machines. But are they ignorant of their own history? How many times the cross was turned into sword; how many times, the message of the Prince of Peace was blown through the barrels of smoking guns; how many time innocent men and women were burnt on the stakes under the ‘pious’ gaze of cardinals! The list goes on and on. The terror of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and numerous Papal Bulls present that dimension of Christian history that is conveniently swept under the rug. Perhaps, they would argue that the subsequent events and movements have transformed Christianity into a civilization that no longer resorts to these horrible acts, and that the Enlightenment and the French Revolution changed the ways of the Europeans and the Americans. Let us look at the post-Enlightenment period.

European Colonialism was one of the gifts of the Enlightenment not only to the Muslim world but also to many Afro-Asian nations. The British, the French, and the Italians acted as ruthlessly in their colonies as they possibly could. Lewis would argue that they did as members of the human race but did they leave their faith and its demands back in Europe! It was economic, social, intellectual, and political terrorism unleashed by the Christians. Across the Atlantic, Christianity was chiseled into a political doctrine called ‘manifest destiny’ where God’s will manifest in the way native Indians were treated or Africans were treated. Ku Klux Klan even burnt crosses after large-scale murders of non-whites and non-Christians. But none of this was termed as Christian terrorism. During the unprecedented terrors of holocaust, even though Nazis received support from many organs of the Church, no philosopher or ‘expert’ on terrorism called it Christian terrorism.

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, the world has seen another kind of terrorism. The 1948 massacre of Palestinians at Deir Yassin was described by the International Commission of Inquiry in these words: "the extent to which Israeli participation in prior massacres against the Palestinian people creates a most disturbing pattern of a political struggle carried on by means of mass terror directed at civilians, including women, children and the aged."⁵⁰ In 1982, Ariel Sharon, then defense minister of Israel, allowed his Christian allies in Lebanon to enter the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. What followed was a two-day orgy of bloodshed, torture, and rape of unarmed elderly men, women, and children. The exact number of the dead will never be known but in the words of Peggy Thomson, 'the death toll may in fact be as high or higher than that of the September 11 attacks on America.'⁵¹ Even though the term terror was used in both cases, no one equated it with Jewish terrorism. In fact, mere criticism of Sharon in many European and American circles disturbed Lewis. He complained: "It is understandable that the Palestinians and other Arabs should lay sole blame for the massacre on Sharon. What is puzzling is that Europeans and Americans should do the same."⁵²

In Bosnia alone, 200,000 Muslims have been slaughtered by Serbian Christians. These followers of Christ also raped 22,000 Muslim women, aged 9 to 82. Western journalists and intellectuals named these horrors 'ethnic cleansing' even though the victims belonged to the same ethnic stock as that of their murderers. Even these inhuman and shameless crimes did not earn the title of

⁵⁰ Quoted in Peggy Thomson, "20 years After Sabra and Shatila: The Forgotten Massacres", CounterPunch, September 18, 2002

⁵¹ Peggy Thomson, *Ibid.*

⁵² Bernard Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East*, quoted in Charles Glass, "Lewis of Arabia", *The Nation*, September 13, 2004.

Christian terrorism. We can provide numerous examples of the violent behaviour of the people of other faiths such as Muslim genocide at the hands of the Hindu fanatics, atrocities inflicted by the Japanese on the Chinese during the Second World War. But none of these crimes against humanity were treated as a generic malady. More recently, while ‘liberating Iraq’, the British and the American soldiers were found engaged in the most sickening and deranged behaviour in the prisons of Abu Gharib and Basra. The gory details of these terrors would render the torturers of the Inquisition as amateurish but apparently even such heinous crimes fall short of being labeled as terrorism of a ‘superior civilization’.

We are back to the question as to why the murder of about three thousand people, if at all those who are blamed for it, carried it out, subjected the fifteen hundred years of Muslim civilization to terrorism. What is even more appalling is the silence over the fact that this so-called war against terrorism is being fought with the help of Muslims!

Violence in the name of religion or in the name of lofty ideals like democracy and freedom, is not the monopoly of any race, faith, or nation, all of us are capable of doing horrible things to others. Our ancestors did not need any clichés to occupy, kill or suppress others. In many ways, they were more honest. We claim to be civilized and criticize them for doing horrible things to other human beings. We need excuses; excuses that people would buy to make our adventures legal and ‘noble’. It was this drive that led the war hawks, the court historians, and the propagandists to imagine fantastic theories and then to find someone stupid enough to believe in those and implement their agenda. Tom Hayden has rightly pointed out:

“The fundamental paradigm of the Cold War era was that an innocent democratic America was threatened by a shadowy Communist conspiracy representing two billion people in countries with nuclear capabilities and an amoral disregard for human life. This fearful paradigm justified America's first permanent military establishment, alliances with despotic right-wing dictators around the world, and a domestic politics that smeared dissenters who were charged with being "soft on communism." Those are exactly the dynamics in play again today.”⁵³

There were, and still are, many voices in America and Europe who did not buy the idea of the clash of civilizations but they are drowned under the currents of either ‘patriotism’ or even being labeled as liberals or even worst, leftists.

Conclusion:

We have seen how after the end of the Cold War, the idea of the new enemy was crafted by a group of war hawks including both the Christian fanatics and the Zionists. It will indeed be relevant to go back to 9/11 and sum up the sequence of this theory and the way it was implemented.

It started with Bin Laden as a suspect in carrying out those attacks. Now, we know that the Bush administration had already planned attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. Now, we also know that Iraq did not possess any weapons of mass destruction. Recently released documents by the State Department also show that the Taliban wanted to co-operate with the United States if they would provide evidence of Bin Laden’s involvement. It is only fair to conclude that the Bush administration and his cronies in the Muslim world

⁵³ Tom Hayden, “It is Empire Versus Democracy”, AlterNet, September 10, 2002.

also knew these facts. But still Afghanistan was attacked even when not a single Afghan was involved in the 9/11 attacks. Hamid Karzai, after desperately trying to get a diplomatic position under the Taliban, had joined an American oil company, UNOCAL. Now, he is looking after the Afghan affairs in Kabul after being ‘elected’ for this job. Zalmay Khalilzad also tried to win over the Taliban and wrote an op-ed in *The Washington Times* in 1996 urging the United States to recognize the Taliban government- “which he argued was neither anti-American nor terrorist.”⁵⁴ Next year, he joined the hawks of New American Century Project, and later served the Bush administration as the U.S. envoy to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the United Nations. Ahmad Chalabi passed on to the American establishment ‘*Arabian Nights* tales of Saddam Hussein’s illegal weapons’⁵⁵ because he did not like being charged with accusations of financial frauds. He remained Bush’s blue-eyed boy for some time. But when he accused Washington hawks of misgoverning Iraq, his house was raided and he was threatened with arrest. He was replaced with a new boy, Ayad Alawi, who had come to the United States as a teenager and had worked for the CIA. This is the real story of the clash of civilizations and the war against terrorism. The new century has witnessed the revival of the American version of the East India Company.

Such an ambitious undertaking needed a lot of planning and thinking. What has been described in some circles as prophetic anticipations of Lewis and Huntington, were, in fact, plans. As we have seen in the first section, an idea was floated that Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions have nothing in common and that they have been on the opposite sides since a long time and that the

⁵⁴ Quoted in Eric Rouleau, “Trouble in the Kingdom”, *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 81 No.4, July/August 2002

⁵⁵ Charles Glass, “Lewis of Arabia”, *The Nation*, September 13, 2004.

conflict between them was inevitable. It suited the Israeli lobby as well as the Christian Right. The result was that the ideologues from both sides joined hands and crafted a theory that Islam was the next enemy. The discovery of an enemy that could be anywhere in the world also gave them a free range in imagining and targeting any country that was suspected of harbouring the terrorists.

Even when Bin Laden was a suspect, the world accepted the American official/media interpretation and helped them, even though there was no justification in attacking Afghanistan, in removing the Taliban. But when Bush decided to attack Iraq, it became clear that 9/11 was being used as a pretext to implement the court historians' theory. During the debate on Iraq's alleged stockpile of weapons of mass destruction, we saw a different side of American journalism. Many students, intellectuals, citizens, and others held mammoth rallies and demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq. But at the end of the day, the hawks had their way.

Shortly after the Americans started bombing Afghanistan, one could hear clear and loud voices in favour of extending the frontiers of this war. William Kristol and Robert Kagan called this attack only as the 'opening battle' of a long war that would "spread and engulf a number of countries" because, in their view the clash of civilizations had begun.⁵⁶ The militant organ of the American Jewish League was more direct. Its editor, Norman Podhoretz, urged the Americans to 'fight World War IV...the war against militant Islam', and to 'impose a new political culture on the defeated parties'.⁵⁷ In March 2002, the Pulitzer Prize winner columnist, Thomas Friedman, discovered 'something about this

⁵⁶ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, *The Weekly Standard*, October 29, 2001.

⁵⁷ Commentary quoted in M. Shahid Alam, "Is This a Clash of Civilizations?" in *CounterPunch*, February 28, 2003

new, intensely violent, stage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that is starting to feel like the fuse for a much larger war of civilizations'. After enlarging the scope of this war, he also connected the dots and identified the 'culprits':

“ This is dangerous. The notion is taking hold- it started with Osama bin Laden, was refined by Palestinian suicide bombers and is cheered on by Hezbollah, Iran and other radicals -that with a combination of demographics (a baby boom) and terrorism, the Arabs can actually destroy Israel. Some radicals even fantasize that they can undermine America.”⁵⁸

This is a piece of journalism that a paper like the New York Times published on its editorial page. Usually critical of the policies of the establishment, however, in the case of invasion of Iraq, this leading newspaper did not observe its own standards. Its editors recalled how the 'controversial', and 'questionable' information was allowed to 'stand unchallenged. Looking back, we wish we have been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged-or failed to emerge.'⁵⁹ It is difficult to comment whether this realization was because of some reawakening of conscience or a part of the election campaign. The situation at the *Washington Post* was even worst.

Before we see the contribution of this major newspaper in strengthening the idea of Islamic terrorism, it would be relevant to see how the case against Iraq was built by the administration and the Republican hawks and then, how the media became an official organ of the establishment. Just after the 9/11 attacks, Bush asked his staff to “See, if Saddam did this.” The official memo could not

⁵⁸ Thomas Friedman, “A Foul Wind”, The New York Times, March 10, 2002

⁵⁹ “The Times and Iraq”, The New York Times, May 26, 2004.

come up with any evidence. But Paul Wolfowitz made the case for striking Iraq because "he saw this [attack against Iraq] as one way of using this event as a way to deal with the Iraqi problem".⁶⁰ Newspapers and television would soon join in extending the scope of this war.

Richard Holbrooke, the former ambassador to the United Nations, had traveled to Kandhar to have a meeting with Mulla Omar, endorsed President Bush's policy of regime change in Iraq but asserted that his case would be strengthened if he took it to the United Nations. "The road to Baghdad runs through the United Nations Security Council". Two days later, Alexander Haig, appearing on the same page, *Washington Post* Op-Ed page, announced his unqualified support for the President's policy. "Ultimately," he wrote, a US foreign policy "that allows a country such as Iraq to acquire weapons of mass destruction while violating solemn agreements is a guarantee of a world on the edge of greater terrors to come." Three days after that, it was Bob Dole's turn. Calling Iraq a "runaway freight train loaded with explosives barreling toward us," Dole wrote, "We can act to derail it or wait for the crash and deal with the resulting damage."⁶¹

If we pursue this list, we will see former Secretaries of State lined up to support the idea of extending the war to Iraq. For example, George Shultz, James Baker, and Henry Kissinger strongly argued for war. Commenting on the attitude of the editors, Massing wrote:

"The only time the *Post* faults the President is when he doesn't make the case for invasion persuasively enough."⁶² Former

⁶⁰ Colin Powell's testimony before the 9/11 Commission, See the Report, p.335

⁶¹ Michael Massing, "Hawks at The Washinton Post" *The New York Times*, November 11, 2002.

⁶² *Ibid.*

President, Jimmy Carter attributed the Administration's unilateralist approach to “a core group of conservatives who are trying to realize long-pent-up ambitions under the cover of the proclaimed war against terrorism.”⁶³ This was happening when the Muslim world was accused of preaching hatred through the religious schools. But these newspapers and other organs of mass media, who were constantly busy in doing something that journalism is not supposed to do- to present strong opinions as facts- were generating more hatred against the Muslims than perhaps all the combined sources of anti-American hatred in the Muslim world.

While the thesis of Muslim-hate-America was being advanced against the Muslims, no one pointed out to the loving Americans what the official priests of the Bush family, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, were saying about Islam, the Prophet, and the Holy Book? How, in different ways, even some of the responsible and sober newspapers and networks were portraying Islam as the enemy. It is time to see how this hatred against Islam has given rise to Islamophobia in the United States and Europe, and how the millions of Muslims are being subjected to the horrors of war and destruction.

Islamic fundamentalism, militant Islam, and other terms, which were in circulation prior to 9/11, have been replaced with Islamic terrorism. Surprisingly, this term is applied even to those who fight against the aggressor and the occupier. But what remains unnoticed is the rise of militant Christianity. Even though Bush withdrew his call to crusades after the 9/11, his church strongly believes that the present war is a religious war. Over the last thirty years, evangelical Christians have grown both in numbers and influence. The image of a loving Jesus has been replaced with “the

⁶³ Ibid.

image of a fearsome Jesus who will turn the tables on the unbelieving earthly authorities ...Men and women soldiers and horses seemed to explode where they stood”, Dr. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins write. “It was as if the very words of the Lord had superheated their blood, causing it to burst through their veins and skin.” The authors add, “Even as they struggled, their own flesh dissolved, their eyes melted and their tongues disintegrated.”⁶⁴ What is even more dangerous is the fact that the present crisis between Islam and Judeo-Christian tradition is viewed in the light of the “Biblical prophesies of the apocalypse around the turn of the millennium, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 and the two wars with Iraq. And the warlike image of Jesus also fits with President George W. Bush’s discussion of a godly purpose behind American military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq.”⁶⁵ During the 2004 elections, the word ‘liberalism’ was equated with being less American or even unpatriotic. One of the reasons that explained the victory of George W. Bush was the role of the church in his victory.

Thus, there is a natural alliance between the staunch Zionists and the militant Christians. The influence of Israeli prime minister has risen to such an extent that even Thomas Friedman wrote: “Mr. Sharon has the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat under house arrest in his office in Ramallah, and he’s had George Bush under house arrest in the Oval Office. Mr. Sharon has Mr. Arafat surrounded by tanks, and Mr. Bush surrounded by Jewish and Christian pro-Israel lobbyists, by a vice President, Dick Cheney, who’s ready to do whatever Mr. Sharon dictates, and by political handlers telling the president not to put any pressure on Israel in an election year-all

⁶⁴ Quoted in David Kirkpatrick, “The Return of the Warrior Jesus”, The New York Times, April 4, 2004

⁶⁵ Ibid.

conspiring to make sure the president does nothing.”⁶⁶ Because of this influence, many believe that this agenda was advanced

by the Zionists and it sounded music to the ears of the Conservatives. The invasion of Iraq, as we have seen earlier, was authored by Paul Wolfowitz for the benefit of Israel. When General Zinni was asked to comment on this, he said: “ I couldn’t believe what I was hearing about the benefits of this strategic move- that road to Jerusalem led through Baghdad, when just the opposite is true, the road to Baghdad led through Jerusalem.”⁶⁷

There is one more puzzling point about the activities of the terrorists. Their timing was perfect: whenever a nation was reluctant to support Bush, it immediately became victim of this global network. Russia strongly opposed the American aggression against Iraq, but has been punished by ‘al-Qaida’ many times. The French also opposed this war, and ‘al-Qaida’ visited them with terrorist attacks. Then, al-Jazirah’s role in this whole affair raises many questions. This television network had amazing capacity to receive both audio and video messages from Bin Laden and his associates that combined forces of the British, the American, and so many other countries’ intelligence agencies had not been able to track him down. These messages would appeal the American voters not to vote for Bush by a man who has ‘vowed’ to kill Americans. When a united Iraq under a democratic government has more chances of ending the American occupation, these Muslim terrorists ask one group of Muslims to kill the other group either because they follow a different school or they are eager to have their own government. At the end of the day, one wonders as to

⁶⁶ The New York Times, February 5, 2004.

⁶⁷ Nicholas Kristof, “The Bush and Kerry Tilt”, The New York Times, May 26, 2004.

how and where these messages come from and whose purpose they serve!

We have gone through the various versions of Islam and terrorism, and the reasons behind the popularity of this dogma. The 9/11 Commission Report, however, accepts the thesis of Lewis and Huntington. There are many hilarious remarks in that report like Bin Laden wants to convert the Americans to Islam and that he has been influenced by the ideas of Imam Ibn Taimiyyah. It is indeed revealing that the Commission considers even the ideas of Ibn Taimiyyah dangerous because he “condemned both corrupt rulers and the clerics who failed to criticize them. He urged Muslims to read the Quran and the Hadith for themselves, not to depend solely on learned interpreters like himself...”⁶⁸ The other leader who had supposedly influenced Bin Laden is Sayyid Qutb, a leader of *Ikhwan-al Muslimun*, and was executed by the government of Jamal Abdul Nasir. He was also more critical of corruption and maladministration in Muslim societies. What should we read in this observation that the United States approves corruption and bad governments in the Muslim world and all those scholars who condemned this corruption were ‘terrorists’!

The chapter on ‘What to Do? A Global Strategy’ if not written by Bernard Lewis, heavily borrows from his works on the theory of the clash of civilizations. For example, the Commission offers the same explanation for ‘Muslim anger’ against the United States that Lewis had offered many years ago: “Because the Muslim world has fallen behind the West politically, economically, and militarily for the past three centuries, and because few tolerant or secular Muslim democracies provide alternative model for the future, Bin Laden’s

⁶⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report, pp. 50-51

message finds receptive years.”⁶⁹ What is even more regrettable is that in order to support this view, the Commission quotes from a speech of Mahathir Mohammed who not only provided a successful model but also delivered this speech two years after the 9/11 attacks.⁷⁰ Since the American support to Israel had become a part of this debate, the Commission declared:

“ Right or wrong, it is simply a fact that American policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American actions in Iraq are dominant staples of popular commentary across the Arab and Muslim world. That does not mean U.S. choices have been wrong.”⁷¹ Arrogance cannot be put in better words. But even more revealing is the way the question of security is addressed: “...the American homeland is the planet.”⁷²

The above-mentioned observations indeed clarify the reasons behind this connection between Islam and terrorism. Reflecting on the way Islamic terrorism is viewed as an evil that has to be fought and destroyed, Tom Hayden observes:

“American conservatives substitute theology for sociology, psychology, and history. Since the evil they seek to purge is defined as innate to human nature, and satanic, it arises from no causes that can be addressed politically or economically. The only option for Pentagon planners when confronted with evil is war, which is the secular equivalent of exorcism, or conversion to the American Way of Life.

⁶⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 362

⁷⁰ This speech was delivered on October 16, 2003 See notes in the Report, p.562.

⁷¹ The 9/11 Commission Report, p.376.

⁷² The 9/11 Commission Report, p.362

That this is actually a logical crutch, a rhetorical device, is shown by the ease with which the stamp of evil is applied and removed. Mujahideen, including Osama Bin Laden, were not "evil" when the U.S. government supplied them with weapons and funding in the 1980s, because then the Islamic fundamentalists were battling true "evil" in the form of the Soviet Union. But the label of evil has its uses. It serves to shut off rational debate, for example. It stimulates public fear. It justifies the killing of people whose annihilation might be problematic if they were classified as simply desperate. Fighting evil is good politics."⁷³

⁷³ Tom Hayden, *op. cit.*